

Franklin County to put off adding new judge

Published: November 4, 2013
Tri-City Herald

By Geoff Folsom, Tri-City Herald

Franklin County commissioners agreed Monday to pay for half of a position in the county clerk's office, while putting off adding a seventh Superior Court judge.

They also plan to add a new civil attorney for the prosecutor's office.

But the budget will not be voted on until later this month or in early December.

Clerk Mike Killian pleaded with commissioners for the extra position during Monday's workshop on the county's proposed 2014 budget.

The records deputy would have cost \$41,602; about half of that would have been paid for using money from the state.

Killian argued that his office has 13 employees, the same number it did 12 years ago.

"The county has doubled in size, the police department has doubled in size," he said. "We're doing the work with the same number of people."

The clerk in Benton County has 33 employees, while Grant and Chelan counties each have three more employees than Franklin County, Killian said.

The Franklin clerk's number of employees per cases filed is higher than Benton County, said Commissioner Brad Peck.

"You present it as though you're severely understaffed by comparison," Peck said.

He suggested that Killian contract with the Franklin County Museum to have people there work on archiving documents.

Commissioners also are concerned that half the offsetting money from the state that Killian wants to use for the position would come from the state auditor's operations and maintenance fund. County officials disagree on whether that money can be used to pay a salary.

Peck initially didn't want to pay for the position at all, but commissioners agreed to leave half of it in the budget after Commissioner Bob Koch suggested making it part-time.

They agreed to use the \$10,000 of offsetting money that wasn't in dispute to help pay for it.

Commissioners left \$82,215 in the budget to pay for a new deputy civil attorney in the prosecutor's office.

Commission Chairman Rick Miller said the county has been looking at adding that position for a long time.

"This is good since we can get in trouble with all the public records (requests) and all those things going on," Miller said.

But commissioners said no to \$22,424 request for a part-time legal secretary in the prosecutor's office.

The prospect of a seventh judge in Benton-Franklin Superior Court is one reason Killian gave for needing extra staff. Gov. Jay Inslee signed a bill in May creating the judgeship, but it will still need funding from the two counties before a judge can be appointed.

Superior Court judges are paid \$149,000 a year. Franklin county is being asked to pay \$25,543 a year.

Commissioners did not agree on the Superior Court budget Monday, partly because of questions about \$10,385 that recently has been requested for juvenile legal services.

Court Administrator Pat Austin asked them to make a decision before she goes to Benton County commissioners to ask for money for the judgeship.

The commissions can vote to pay for the new judge for a year or a half-year, Austin explained. The governor will have three months to appoint a judge once the position is funded.

She told the Herald that a new judge could be on the bench by April.

The county is short \$24,720 from balancing the budget without the superior court requests of \$87,886. That would leave the county \$112,606 short.

Miller said he is confident commissioners can make cuts or find new revenue to get to the state-mandated balanced budget.

"We can get in and say, 'Is this really needed?' " Miller said. "We've done a good job of tightening up in the past."

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Read more here: <http://www.tri-cityherald.com/2013/11/04/2658553/franklin-county-to-put-off-adding.html#storylink=cpy>